

# Former scholar takes fast track to Rotary service

Just two years after his Rotary Ambassadorial Scholarship, Corbett Daniel Parker, 28, not only became a Rotarian but also charter president of a new 24-member Rotary club.

With the help of other Foundation alumni, Parker formed the Rotary Club of Houston Skyline, Texas, USA, last June (see “Club brings new ideas, energy to Rotary”). The club has quickly become active in service projects, including a Rotary Foundation Matching Grant effort that will help educate communities in the Philippines about dengue fever.

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Rhonda Kennedy

Parker’s interest in Rotary began as a 2005-06 scholar through his relationship with his sponsor club, the Rotary Club of Galleria Area (Houston), Texas, including sponsor counselor Pieter DeBuck. “I said, ‘Look at these Rotarians — they’re motivated by each others’ willingness to serve, they’re great friends, they’re making a positive impact.’ I definitely had an inclination to be a Rotarian even before I left for the scholarship.”

During his Rotary Scholarship in the Netherlands, Parker studied in the masters in European private law program at the Universiteit van Amsterdam. He participated in everything from forums on American foreign policy, to volunteering for Rotary club projects, to organizing Texas-style chili and barbeque dinners for Dutch and international students.

Parker says a supportive family, his

Christian faith, and a sense of giving back for the opportunities he received all helped cultivate his path to Rotary service. “I believe that knowledge calls, ultimately, for a life of service,” he says.

As an attorney practicing corporate transactional law in downtown Houston, Parker looked for a way to serve, and Rotary seemed like the logical next step. He talked with members of the Galleria Area club, including Rotary Foundation Alumni Coordinator D’Lisa Simmons, another former Rotary Scholar, about how to set up a new downtown Rotary club.

“The downtown area of Houston is underserved in Rotary, since our other downtown club moved out about 15 years ago. There was an excellent opportunity to bring Rotary back into downtown Houston and draw on a generation that is underrepresented in Rotary: professionals in their 20s, 30s, and 40s,” says Simmons, who transferred her membership to the Houston Skyline club, bringing her experience as a past district governor and work with Houston Foundation alumni.

Parker also visited clubs throughout District 5890 to enlist Foundation alumni to form the Greater Houston Area Rotary Foundation Alumni Association. In addition, he has given speeches at colleges in California and Texas to recruit potential candidates for Rotary Ambassadorial Scholarships, is a member of District 5890’s Ambassadorial Scholar Selection Committee, and will serve as the district’s Rotary Foundation alumni chair in 2009-10.

“Corbett is great to work with,” says District 5890 Governor Rhonda Kennedy. “If we had more Corbett Parkers, Rotary could easily exceed its 1.2 million-member mark. He’s one of those Rotarians who knows what needs to be done and just does it — without having to ask him. To have more Rotarians like that would be a district governor’s dream come true.”



Corbett Daniel Parker (first row, kneeling) and members of the Rotary Club of Houston Skyline pitch in on the club’s Habitat for Humanity Day.

## Club brings new ideas, energy to Rotary

The Rotary Club of Houston Skyline is one of the most diverse clubs in District 5890. Members include Latin and African Americans, and immigrants from Eastern and Western Europe, South America, and Africa, ranging from 23 to 50 years old. The club’s ranks include bankers, attorneys, medical researchers, social workers, and many other professionals, six Foundation alumni among them.

Corbett Daniel Parker says he isn’t interested in a Rotary club where people come for a meal, listen to people speak, maybe give a little money, then leave. “We get together and talk about each other’s lives and how we can go out and make a difference together in a profound way. Fellowship and service should take place every time we get together. I like to walk around and engage everyone, and keep the atmosphere light and fun.”

To attract a new generation of mem-

bers, the club has modernized its approach. Meetings take place over cocktails in the evening instead of mornings or during lunch, to accommodate members’ work schedules. Members under age 35 pay lower membership dues. Outside of meetings, Rotary fellowship continues through text and e-mail messaging and social networking Web sites like Facebook and LinkedIn.

Although the club’s approach may be new in Rotary, its commitment to service is not, as seen in its hands-on approach to community service. “We have a lot of sweat equity functions, such as sorting books in a warehouse for shipment to South Africa or working on a Habitat (for Humanity) home, or helping a cancer group conduct a race at 6 a.m.,” Past District Governor D’Lisa Simmons says. “There’s good participation and it’s not always the same people doing all the work.”

## Rotarians can help alumni receptions rise to the occasion

As assistant general coordinator of the Rotary Foundation alumni coordinators, I’m gratified to see that more and more Rotarians are recognizing Foundation alumni as a special asset and helping them stay connected to Rotary. A good way to do that is by holding a Foundation alumni reception in conjunction with a Rotary event such as a district conference or assembly or a Foundation, membership, or presidents-elect training seminar.

In the Washington, D.C., area, for example, semiannual alumni receptions are very popular with Rotarians and alumni

alike. Hosted by the Rotary Club of Capitol Hill, the reception brings together 40 to 60 alumni for several hours of networking; reconnecting with Rotarians, fellow alumni, and Rotary International; and learning about the Foundation’s efforts.

The Washington reception has traditionally been a stand-alone event, unconnected with another Rotary program or conference. In September, however, the reception was linked with the Rotary Institute for Zones 31 and 32 in Philadelphia, enabling alumni to interact with past, present, and future Rotary officers, including

RI directors and other senior leaders.

Here’s how Rotarians can link an alumni reception with a Rotary event:

- Talk to the chair of the institute, district conference, seminar, or other Rotary event you want to partner with and get permission for the alumni reception to be a part of it.
- Reserve a room for the reception for approximately two hours where the event is being held.
- Arrange for refreshments; light snacks and drinks are sufficient.
- If you’re the Rotary Foundation alumni coordinator (RFAC) for the area, work with the district Foundation committee, alumni subcommittee chair(s), or alumni association(s). Use the district alumni database to identify area alumni to develop an invitation list. If you’re the alumni subcommittee chair or interested in organizing an alumni reception, contact the RFAC for the region (see page 12 or www.rotary.org).
- Prepare written or electronic invitations. Ask alumni to RSVP to determine refreshment quantities.
- If alumni will be invited to sessions or meals before or after the reception, ask them to complete a registration form. (A fee can be charged for these activities, but it’s recommended that alumni not be charged for the reception.)

- Have a registration table where alumni can fill in a name tag on arrival. Collect up-to-date contact information from alumni and provide them with Rotary Foundation brochures or other materials.
- The reception should be long on networking, reconnecting, and conversation and short on program — 20 minutes of program is plenty.
- About an hour into the reception, welcome alumni and guests. Invite alumni to share brief comments, allowing time to answer any questions.
- The reception’s short-term goal is to reconnect with alumni, some of whom may not have heard from Rotarians in years. Longer-term goals can include alumni membership in a Rotary club, participation in service projects, and donations to the Foundation. Rotarians should be available at the reception to follow up with alumni interested in staying connected with Rotary.

Alumni receptions linked to Rotary events can be an easy and cost-effective way to get alumni together with each other and Rotarians, inspire the creation of an alumni association, and help strengthen the family of Rotary.

— Jeffrey Cadorette



Alumni in attendance included Marisa Collins (AS05-06 USA to Brazil); Kristen Welker (AS99-00 USA to Spain); Jeffrey Cadorette, the event organizer; and Peter Kyle (AS73-74 New Zealand to USA), District 7620 alumni subcommittee chair.